

THE COLONIAL NEWSLETTER FOUNDATION, INC.

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THE COLONIAL NEWSLETTER

We are pleased to include the attached Coin World reprint of John J. Ford, Jr's. complete discussion of his recent acquisition of the 1783 NOVA "5" - last known in the collection of Samuel Curwen some 193 years ago - and of its relationship to the 1783 NOVA CONSTELLATIO silver patterns.

The discovery of the NOVA "5" was briefly mentioned in RF-49A & B in CNL Nos. 57 and 58. Our sincere thanks to John for providing this reprint for our CNL Patrons so that they will have the complete text for their files .

JCS



Coin World

THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF THE ENTIRE NUMISMATIC FIELD

COMBINING WORLD COINS & NUMISMATIC SCRAPBOOK

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Long lost American half cent back home

One of America's first coins, missing for 193 years, is safe and secure in the collection of John J. Ford Jr., Rockville Centre, N.Y., numismatist.

Ford revealed for the first time this week that he owns the rare and historically important 1783 Five, 5 Unit (Half cent) piece in copper, part of the famous Nova Constellatio pattern series prepared for consideration by the nation's first lawmakers.

Ford told *Coin World* he bought the coin Feb. 14, 1978, but elected not to announce the acquisition to the numismatic world until now.

The numismatic scholar and researcher broke the news of his purchase of the piece on the heels of his acquisition of three 1783 Nova Constellatio silver patterns for just under half a million dollars. He was the successful bidder for these at the Garrett Collection sale by Bowers and Ruddy Galleries for the Johns Hopkins University in New York Nov. 29.

These coins were described by the cataloger as "Four of the rarest, most historically important and most desirable issues in the Garrett Collection." (A fourth type II coin went to Walter Perschke, of Chicago.)

"The importance of these coins is unsurpassed in the field of American numismatics," Q. David Bowers, president of the auction house, declared.

But where had the companion copper piece been for nearly two centuries?

Ford said it was discovered in 1977 by an English coin dealer in Paris, France, hiding in an old collection of British colonial coins.

"Not sure of what he had uncovered, the London-

based discoverer gave it to an American friend who was to identify it and to then investigate its history and importance," Ford said.

"The idea was, of course," he added "to obtain enough information to arrive at the coin's value and possible selling price."

In time, Ford said, the coin was brought to him, and he purchased it for an undisclosed figure from Fred S. Werner, Bellmore, N. Y. Werner had purchased the piece from the British dealer-finder Dec. 11, 1977.

"I nearly went into cardiac arrest to see a coin that had disappeared 193 years ago," Ford said. "Its reappearance is undoubtedly one of the major American numismatic discoveries of this century, if not the prime one."

Thus Ford has reassembled a set of the first four U.S. coins, last together in 1783 and 1784.

He has traced the route of the nation's first Half cent, and first copper coin, from its maker, Benjamin Dudley, to Robert Morris, Superintendent of Finance of the new nation, and Director of the Office of Finance under the Congress of the Confederation.

Then it went to William Hemsley, a member of a congressionally-appointed coinage study committee (nothing new under the sun). Back it went to Robert Morris in August, 1783, and then to Josiah Bartlett, a signer of the Declaration of Independence from New Hampshire.

"Either Robert Morris to whom I am sure the coins were returned or Gouverneur Morris, the assistant financier, removed the lowest denominated piece from

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America's first "Half cent," long lost to numismatic history, is now in the collection of John J. Ford Jr., Rockville Centre, N.Y., scholar. The 1783 Five, 5 Unit piece in copper was purchased Feb. 14, 1978, but Ford has just disclosed his ownership. The piece surfaced in France, in a collection of British colonial coins, discovered by a British dealer in 1977. Two months later it was obtained by Fred S. Werner, Bellmore, N.Y., and sold to Ford.

A Coin World exclusive interview

Ford reassembles set of first U.S. coins

For more than a month numismatic scholar, John J. Ford Jr., Rockville Centre, N.Y., and COIN WORLD editor, Margo Russell, have worked on this interview — ever since a November auction sale in New York. This was the first in a series of sales to dispose of the historic Garrett collection of United States coins by its academic owner, Johns Hopkins University, through the California firm, Bowers and Ruddy Galleries.

It was at this first sale Ford succeeded in reassembling what historians have termed, and Ford has reaffirmed, the unique set of the first American coins.

Ford and Mrs. Russell consulted by telephone, by mail and finally took to a sky courier to bring the full story to COIN WORLD readers while it is fresh and exciting. The facts will not remain in the confines of

numismatics, however. The significance of Ford's findings has far-reaching historical impact.

Of course, it was Ford, the meticulous researcher, who is never satisfied (fortunately for numismatics) who did most of the work. Apart from the pride of ownership, he applied his well-known vigor and sagacity to this scholarly digging with unusual speed. He complained frequently at having to meet a newspaper deadline. He didn't want to stop when he did.

Ford elected to release details of his research and conclusions by means of this interview through the pages of COIN WORLD to reach the widest audience and in a format that makes numismatic history both lively and palatable.

This is not the first time the Ford-COIN

WORLD-Russell team has brought important facts to the collectors. In 1963, when electro-erosion machining, a spark erosion process to produce perfect dies, threatened the hobby with coin copies, Ford and the Professional Numismatists Guild Inc. teamed with COIN WORLD and the interview technique to bring out the facts and educate hobbyists to the dangers of the threat.

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COIN WORLD's Margo Russell: Herbert Melnick, of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Service Corporation of America (NASCA), purchased as your agent the 1783 Cent or "Bit" (100 Unit) NOVA CONSTELLATIO coin as lot No. 619 in the initial Garrett offering for \$97,500, while you bought the two larger 1783 silver coins, the 500 and 1000 Unit pieces (lots No. 620, No. 622), for \$165,000 and \$190,000.

Isn't this a lot of money for three silver American Colonial coins?

JOHN J. FORD, JR.: A total of \$452,500 for three silver or copper Colonials would indeed be a lot of money, but we are not talking about Colonial or Early American coins as such. The pieces in question are the FIRST ISSUES OF THE INDEPENDENT UNITED STATES STRUCK UNDER OFFICIAL AUSPICES.

COIN WORLD: You call these coins official. Who authorized their manufacture? Couldn't they have been just another speculative issue like, say, the Immune Columbia or Confederatio coppers of 1785?

FORD: Robert Morris was the Superintendent of Finance and directed the activities of the Office of Finance under Congress assembled in Confederation. This was the union of

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About John J. Ford Jr.—

Everything about numismatics challenges John Ford. It may be the lure of the hunt and find of U.S. pattern coinage or the disciplines he believed, early on, needed to be imposed upon the science-hobby-industry. He pioneered in drafting blueprints for an authentication service, for numismatic industry self-regulation and for a plan of attack on fakes and fakers with their detrimental counterfeits and reproductions.

John Ford, the scholar, has won two American Numismatic Association Heath literary awards for his writings in *The Numismatist*, official ANA magazine. He is ANA life member No. 250. Researchers are constantly indebted to John Ford, the cataloger, for his research which has appeared since 1950 in the New Netherlands Coin Co. catalogs. Recently he provided extensive assistance to Q. David Bowers in the preparation of Bowers' *The History of United States Coinage* as illustrated by the Johns Hopkins University's Garrett Collection.

John Ford, the professional, is chairman of the Professional Numismatists Guild Inc. ethics committee. A PNG director for five years, Ford was the first recipient of the Guild's founder's award for developing certificate and robbery prevention programs.

Ford, the soldier, served with a branch of the Army's Military Intelligence Service during World War II. Ford, the conservationist, designed an Arizona home to be heated and cooled by solar energy. Ford, the family man, credits his wife, Joan, and his daughters for providing the proper atmosphere in which a dedicated numismatist can do his best work.

The Ford sons-in-law collect, too. Brian G. Dobbins, who mar-



John J. Ford Jr.

ried Susan Ford, collects early political tokens and \$3 obsolete bank notes. They live in Scottsdale, Ariz. John Satenstein, who married Leslie Ford, is a collector of military medals with emphasis on the Third Reich. They live in New York City. Kimberly Ford, the youngest daughter, is a student, currently transferring to a university in the east.

SPECIAL Inside COIN WORLD

First coinage designs

EMINENT NEW YORK numismatist John J. Ford crowns one aspect of his achievements by bringing together the original NOVA CONSTELLATIO pattern coin set for the first time in nearly two centuries. Revealing the long lost half cent pattern he recently acquired, he traces the history of this significant coin find in a magazine-length feature in this issue.

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TOTAL DISTRIBUTION ... 95,667 NET PAID ... 95,517

Ford reassembles set of first U.S. coins

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the American States under the Articles of Confederation, 1781-89.

On Jan. 15, 1782, Morris addressed Congress and, among other monetary matters, proposed the establishment of a Mint and the creation of a money unit that would have "some affinity to the former currency" (British and Spanish standards).

The Superintendent also thought it desirable that his contemplated money unit would represent the "lowest divisible point of money," and that, "although it is not absolutely necessary, yet . . . very desirable," would "be increased in a decimal ratio."

On Feb. 21, 1782, the Grand Committee of Congress, to whom the Morris message had been referred (1) approved the establishment of a Mint and directed him to (2) prepare and report a plan for implementing his Mint proposal. This started the ball rolling, and since Congress then constituted our central form of government, it is official enough for me.

COIN WORLD: Didn't Congress specifically spell out what kind or type of coins its authorized Mint was to manufacture? Or make suggestions concerning weight or design?

FORD: Hardly! No recommendations, so far as is known, no specifics, were prepared or made. The long, hard-fought war with the mother country had only ended a few months earlier, the final peace treaty was not to be signed until the following year.

The monetary situation was chaotic—as Robert Morris himself said on January 15 when speaking of Spanish Colonial dollars (8 Real pieces) . . .

"These pass in Georgia at five Shillings, in North Carolina and New York at eight Shillings, in Virginia and the four Eastern States at six Shillings, in all the other States except South Carolina at seven Shillings and six Pence, and in South Carolina at thirty two Shillings and six Pence."



Robert Morris, Superintendent of Finance, who tried to establish the first United States Mint from 1781 to 1784, and who actively promoted Gouverneur Morris' coinage plan. He hired Benjamin Dudley who made the four 1783 NOVA CONSTELLATIO patterns owned by John J. Ford Jr.

Obviously, they had real problems in that day of quill pens, post riders, and outdoor plumbing, so the details involved in squaring away the confused monetary situation were left up to the Superintendent of Finance and his able assistant, Gouverneur Morris (no relation), to work out.

COIN WORLD: Following his official directive, what did Superintendent of Finance Robert Morris do next?

FORD: In line with the defined dictates of the Congressional Committee of Feb. 21, 1782, he apparently spent the next nine months formulating his ideas and discussing them with the Assistant Superintendent, with whom he had a close personal relationship, since they were involved in many (non-government) business deals together. Undoubtedly, the time was also spent by Robert Morris in day-to-day politicking and political fence mending.

On Dec. 12, 1782, he managed to get back to Congress, but only to recommend that Congress adopt an ordinance declaring the rates at which various foreign coins would be received. Authorities agree that this was only intended as a temporary measure until Congress adopted a coinage system. Clearly, the Office of Finance was playing for time.

COIN WORLD: Can you give us an illustration of what kind of political maneuvering or "fence mending" as you call it actually went on?

FORD: The Morris recommendation of Dec. 12 was referred to a committee four days after he proposed it. This committee consisted of Thomas FitzSimons, Samuel Osgood, and Samuel Wharton, but within three days, Osgood was dropped, and John Rutledge, Alexander Hamilton, and Nathaniel Gorham were added. With Osgood, an avowed enemy of the Superintendent, out, and his friends in, Robert Morris presumably thought that he and his plans faced clearer sailing.

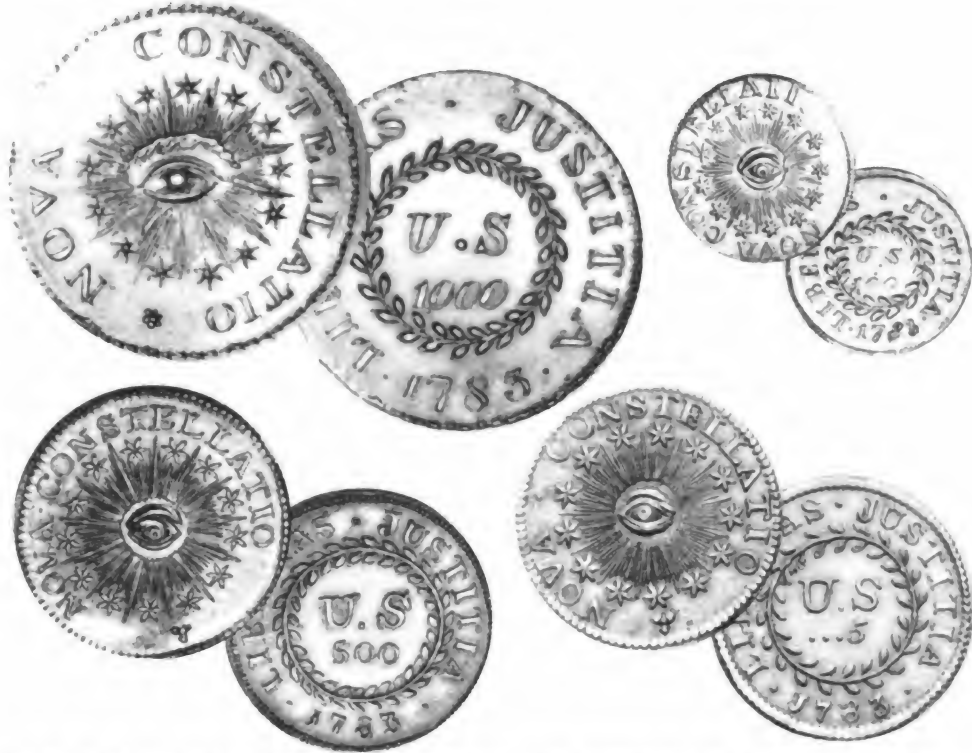
COIN WORLD: What do you think Robert Morris really had in mind?

FORD: Clearly, he wanted to get a Mint into operation and to coin money. As early as mid-November, 1781, only weeks after Yorktown, Robert Morris put a British subject, Benjamin Dudley, on the public pay roll "... as a person absolutely necessary in the Mint, which I hope soon to see established." Late in January, 1782, Dudley was told that the plan for a Mint was before Congress and that he would be "directly employed" were it approved.

COIN WORLD: Who was this Benjamin Dudley?

FORD: Dudley was a man with die manufacturing and related abilities, apparently then located in Boston, who, early on, stated that he could "make the (coining) apparatus and go through the whole process" if required to do so.

John Bradford, of Boston, indirectly told Congress, who referred the remark to Morris, that "Mr. Dudley has already given such proofs of his ingenuity that I view him as an important acquisition to this infant nation, and hope that he will meet with encouragement."



For the first time in 193 years these coins, first issues of the independent United States, struck under official auspices, are together! John J. Ford Jr., New York numismatist, has just disclosed to Coin World he owns the copper "Five" or 5 Unit coin belonging to the 1783 NOVA CONSTELLATIO pattern set. Ford acquired three of the 1783 Nova Constellatio silver patterns at the recent Garrett-Bowers and Ruddy Galleries auction. The nation's first Superintendent of Finance, Robert Morris (1734-1806) termed the first silver coin in the series, "The first that has been struck as an American coin." Top left, 1783 "Mark"; top right, 1783 "Cent" or "Bit"; bottom left, 1783 "Quint"; and the prodigal copper, the "Five" or 5 Unit appears bottom, right. Photos of the coins are considerably enlarged here. They are depicted actual size in the accompanying Ford interview.

Subsequently, in 1786-87, several years following the failure of the federal coinage scheme to get off of the ground, Dudley made dies for New Jersey cents at both the Rahway and Morristown Mints. No doubt, the man possessed considerable talent. Walter Breen can probably tell you more about Benjamin Dudley.

COIN WORLD: After the Congressional Grand Committee approved the establishment of a Mint in February, 1782, and requested that the Office of Finance prepare and submit a coinage plan, what did Robert Morris do in addition to the politicking you mentioned earlier?

FORD: He did plenty! Proceeding as if he had been authorized to act rather than directed to put together and submit a plan, the Superintendent of Finance employed Dudley in making models of the "Screws and Rollers . . . for the Mint," had coin dies made, consulted with David Rittenhouse (later, first Philadelphia Mint Director) and Francis Hopkinson, engaged Samuel Wheeler to make rollers for the production of coin planchets, went out and viewed buildings suitable for employment as a Mint, offered Francis Hopkinson the directorship of the Mint, and, finally, in addition to assaying current coins, manufactured new ones for the young republic.

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Gouverneur Morris, 1752-1816, assistant Superintendent of Finance, 1781-85, who devised the cumbersome, yet ingenious decimal system, under which the Mark, Quint, Cent and Five coins were struck April 2-22, 1783. His leg was amputated after a phaeton accident in May, 1780, in Philadelphia. His horses took fright, ran off, and he was thrown to the pavement "with much violence."

Long lost American half cent back home again

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the group, and gave it to a friend, or else someone in the Office of Finance helped it to disappear," Ford surmises.

"Whatever the circumstances, we know it ended up with Josiah Bartlett, the important gentleman from New Hampshire," he continued, likening the disappearance to that of the 1974 U.S. aluminum cents.

Bartlett presented the piece to Samuel Curwen May 15, 1784, according to a carefully-kept Curwen diary. The piece was described as a "medal" struck in Philadelphia, but its new owner designated a denomination, "U.S. 5, 1783, round, with Libertas et Justitia on one side and an eye surrounded by a glory on the other side, the whole encompassed by 13 stars with the legend, Nova Constellatio."

Curwen spent nine years, from 1775 to 1784, in England where it is recorded that Bartlett gave him the piece. This accounts for its trip across the Atlantic nearly 200 years ago.

The coin itself bears out this description including the legend NOVA CONSTELLATIO on the obverse. It has a plain edge, a diameter of 24.35 mm and weighs 75.15 grains.

Its owner, John Ford, says he has "conservatively" graded it as About Uncirculated-50, but he believes it was undoubtedly struck as a Proof.

More of the lore surrounding this piece and the other

Nova Constellatio patterns is related in the *Coin World* interview with John Ford in this issue.

Each of the Nova Constellatio pattern coins is believed to be unique, and represents the first official American government coinage for which the official record survives today.

"They are unequaled in their numismatic and historical importance," Q. David Bowers says.

The Smithsonian Institution and the American Numismatic Society lack examples of these coins. Eric P. Newman, of St. Louis, another prominent scholar and researcher, owns a 1783 Cent or "Bit" 100 Unit piece.

Walter Perschke, of Chicago, professional numismatist, who bought a Brasher doubloon for \$430,000 at an auction last summer, bought a 1783 Quint, 500 Unit piece, Type II, at the same auction where Ford bought his silver coins. He paid \$55,000 for the coin.

There are a number of references to the Nova Constellatio patterns for students who wish to learn more about what are termed America's first coins.

These include *The Guide Book of United States Coins*, *Scott's Catalogue and Encyclopedia of United States Coins* by Don Taxay and the 1914 American Numismatic Society's Exhibition catalog. Walter Breen's *Encyclopedia of United States and Colonial Proof Coins* devotes a section to these issues and observes they were struck as Proofs.

Sylvester Crosby in his *Early Coins of America*

cites a reference to the "medal" presented to Samuel Curwen as "evidently another of the patterns referred to by Morris, probably that called a 'Five.'" *The Garrett Collection Sales* auction catalog for Nov. 28-29, 1979, is the latest valuable and illustrated reference until this *Coin World* story and interview.

The unique Nova Constellatio coins are not to be confused with the Nova Constellatio copper pieces reportedly produced upon instructions of Gouverneur Morris in large quantities in Birmingham, England.

These were imported as a private business venture by the assistant financier of the Confederation. They were struck from dies said to be made by George Wyon, assisted by teenaged twins Thomas and Peter George.

John Ford believes all of the common Nova Constellatio coppers were struck in 1785 although they are dated 1783 and 1785.

The All-Seeing eye design on the Nova Constellatio coins is still with numismatists today: It can be found on the back of \$1 U.S. bank notes within the Great Seal design.

The eye of Providence, said to have been suggested first by Benjamin Franklin, in the radiant triangle at the top of the pyramid on the bank note is to emphasize the importance of putting the spiritual welfare of the country above the material. It is also to indicate education and freedom of knowledge, according to scholars.

Ford traces history of first U.S. coins

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COIN WORLD: Is there documentation for all of these activities?

FORD: I'll say there is! For starters, I'd suggest "Notes on the Early History of the Mint, from Robert Morris' Diary," in Vol. I, Second Series of *Historical Magazine* (Jan., 1867), pages 30-32. The reference to Hopkinson's offer of the Mint directorship can be found in a letter from Hopkinson to Thomas Jefferson, May 12, 1784.

COIN WORLD: You say that coins were produced. When was the first one made, who made it, and what exactly was it?

FORD: Dudley gave Morris, on April 2, 1783, "a piece of Silver Coin, being the first that has been struck as an American coin" (*Historical Magazine*, I, page 32). Benjamin Dudley, I believe, had hand-engraved the dies for the Mark or 1000 Unit piece, struck but a single specimen, and then delivered that solitary coin to the Superintendent of Finance. All of the available evidence indicates that this very piece was lot No. 622 in the initial Garrett auction, the item that I purchased on last November 29.

COIN WORLD: Sounds like Benjamin Dudley was a one-man operation. Did he have any help in preparing the NOVA CONSTELLATIO dies and striking the coins?

FORD: It seems that Dudley was at the head of a small crew of workers. Sylvester S. Crosby, in his *Early Coins of America*, page 310, reproduces part of a statement of the accounts of the United States, under "Expenditures for Contingencies," January to July, 1783, that indicates that Jacob Eckfield, John Swanwick, and an A. Dubois (whom I cannot, to the present, identify), were also involved in preparing the dies for the NOVA CONSTELLATIO coinage.

COIN WORLD: Does the Crosby account show the number of dies actually made?

FORD: Yes. The Crosby citation states that on May 5, 1783, Mr. A. Dubois was paid \$72 for "sinking, casehardening, etc., four Pair of Dies for the Public Mint."

COIN WORLD: We're confused! The first Bowers and Ruddy Garrett collection offering contained two varieties of the Quint or 500 Unit coin, utilizing the same reverse, in addition to the Cent or "Bit" and the Mark. If our

arithmetic is correct, the four coins offered and sold were made from seven different dies and not eight. How do you explain this?

FORD: The explanation is quite simple. The "four Pair of Dies" mentioned earlier and cited by Crosby were intended for four different coins, employing eight different dies. Delete the second type of Quint (lot No. 621, First Garrett sale) and substitute the "Five" or 5 Unit copper piece, and you have four entirely different coins, three of silver and one of copper, made from "four Pair" of dies.

COIN WORLD: Wait a minute! What is the "Five" or 5 Unit coin? Where is that mentioned... how does it fit in?

FORD: Crosby, again in his *Early Coins of America*, page 312, states: "Samuel Curwen, in his diary, under the date of May 15, 1784, gives the following description of what he calls a medal:—'Mr. Bartlet (sic) presented me with a medal struck in Philadelphia;—in a round compartment stands, 'U.S. . . . 5 . . . 1783;—'round, 'Libertas et Justitia;' on the other side, in the centre, an eye surrounded by a glory; the whole encompassed by thirteen stars,—with the legend, 'Nova Constellatio.'"

As Crosby commented, "This was evidently another of the patterns referred to by Morris, probably that called a 'Five.'"

COIN WORLD: Who was Samuel Curwen?

FORD: Samuel Curwen was a native of Massachusetts, born in Salem in 1715. Graduating from Harvard College in 1735, he planned to enter the ministry, but soon decided that his health wasn't up to it. In 1738, he visited England and the continent. Upon his return to America, he became involved in business, interrupting his career to serve as a captain in Gen. Sir William Pepperell's expedition against the French at Louisburg in 1744-45.

Returning to his mercantile pursuits, Curwen also served as Provincial Impost Officer for Essex County (1759-74) and, later, as a deputy Judge of Admiralty. When the revolution broke out in April, 1775, he decided to withdraw from the impending storm.

Accordingly, he left for Philadelphia on April 23, and departed from there for England on May 13, 1775. As an exiled refugee from a war that he did not believe in, Judge Curwen returned to Massachusetts in the fall of 1784.

He left his wife, Abigail, in Salem, as she was deathly afraid of the ocean voyage abroad. Samuel Curwen died in Salem, in April, 1802, at the advanced age of 86 years.

On Jan. 10, 1780, while still in England, Samuel Curwen made a statement reflecting both his character and his political philosophy—"For my native country I feel a filial fondness; her follies I lament, her misfortunes I pity; her good I ardently wish, and to be restored to her embraces is the warmest of my desires."

During his nine-year absence, from 1775 to 1784, Samuel Curwen kept a detailed journal and maintained a comprehensive file of all of his correspondence. The Curwen journal and letters comprise numerous remarks by many prominent men of the period, combined with a large number of pertinent observations by the judge. The whole, with biographical notes, was put together by George A. Ward, and published in 1842.

Little did refugee Curwen know, when he made an entry in his daily journal concerning a souvenir "medal" brought to him from his native land, that American numismatists and historians would forever be in his debt.

COIN WORLD: Can you tell us who the "Mr. Bartlet" was that Samuel Curwen received the 5 Unit NOVA CONSTELLATIO copper piece from?

FORD: According to Walter Breen (in his *Encyclopedia of United States and Colonial Proof Coins, 1722-1977*, page 8), "Mr. Bartlet" was actually Josiah Bartlett (the accepted spelling!), M.D., a signer of the Declaration of Independence from New Hampshire.

My research indicates that he was the first to vote in favor of that highly important historical statement, as well as being the first to sign the actual document after John Hancock.

Bartlett was born at Amesbury, Mass., in 1729 and died 66 years later, in May of 1795. In June, 1790, he was chosen president of New Hampshire; three years later he was elected the first governor.

Earlier, at various times, he was a colonel in command of a regiment of provincial militia, a delegate to the Continental Congress, and a magistrate. Early in March, 1784, William Pynchon of Salem, a loyalist who did not leave Massachusetts during the war, wrote to Samuel Curwen, advising him that several New Englanders were about to embark for England on the ship *Pilgrim*.

Among the travelers was Doctor Bartlett (who seldom utilized that title or any of his others), at that time a justice of the Superior

Court of New Hampshire. It turned out, that Josiah Bartlett delivered Pynchon's letters, dated March 2 and 4, personally to Samuel Curwen in London on either May 8 or 9.

William Pynchon's letter of March 2 spelled the future governor's name as Bartlett and did not apply any of the man's many titles. On the other hand, Curwen repeatedly spelled the name Bartlet, indicating that they were, at best, acquaintances from years gone by.

On May 15, 1784, Samuel Curwen went shopping with Josiah Bartlett in London, purchasing plays for his lawyer friend Pynchon and law books for another friend named Ward. It was upon this occasion that the visitor from New Hampshire gave Judge Curwen, the exile from Salem, the 1783 "Five" or 5 Unit NOVA CONSTELLATIO copper.

COIN WORLD: Don't keep us in suspense! What happened to the Morris-produced 5 Unit coin presented as a token or souvenir by Bartlett to Curwen?

FORD: It seemingly disappeared from the surface of the earth for nearly two centuries; the actual piece was unknown until about two years ago. In 1977, the sole copper coin in the unique set of the Morris, Office of Finance, Confederation coins of 1783 was discovered by an English coin dealer in Paris, France. It was found there, hiding in an old collection of British colonial coins.

Not sure of what he had uncovered, the London-based discoverer gave it to an American friend who was to identify it and to then investigate its history and importance. The idea, of course, was to obtain enough information so as to arrive at the coin's value or possible selling price. In time, it was brought to me: I purchased it early last year.

COIN WORLD: Is this the first time that you have publicly disclosed that you own the long lost "Five" of the fabulously important NOVA CONSTELLATIO set?

FORD: Yes! A few close friends knew of the discovery of the rarity and that I had acquired it, but I decided it prudent to not publicize the information immediately.

COIN WORLD: No doubt you were thrilled when you first saw the unique specimen of the "Five"?

FORD: Thrilled? I nearly went into cardiac arrest! To see a coin that had disappeared for 193 years was unbelievable. Its reappearance is undoubtedly one of the major American numismatic discoveries of this century, if not the prime one.

COIN WORLD: Back to Robert Morris. How did he arrive at the system that was the basis for the "Five," "Cent" or "Bit," "Quint," and "Mark"?

FORD: The concept was actually one arrived at by Gouverneur Morris, the Assistant Superintendent of Finance. It was he who put together the basis for the presentation by Robert Morris to the President of the Congress on January 15, 1782.

COIN WORLD: Would you please expand on the Gouverneur Morris plan that resulted in the striking of the four 1783 NOVA CONSTELLATIO coins? How did it fit the concept adapted and put forth by Robert Morris, Gouverneur Morris' friend and superior in the Office of Finance.

FORD: The basic unit was to represent $\frac{1}{4}$ grain of fine silver, which in turn was to represent $\frac{1}{1440}$ th of a dollar. The coins were to be of gold, valued at 10,000 Units; of silver, valued at 1,000, 500, and 100 Units; of copper, valued at 8 and 5 Units. Dies for the gold coin and the 8 Unit copper one were never made.

The three unique silver pieces, of course, appeared in the initial Garrett offering as lot Nos. 622, 620 and 619; the equally rare copper was rediscovered in 1977.

As Thomas Jefferson put it in his autobiographical account of his congressional activities in 1784, "The general views of the financier were sound, and the principle was ingenious on which he proposed to found his Unit. But it was too minute for ordinary use, too laborious for computation either by the head or in figures. The price of a loaf of bread $\frac{1}{20}$ of a dollar would be 72. Units; a pound of butter $\frac{1}{5}$ of a dollar 288. Units; a horse or bullock of 80. D. value would require a notation of 6 figures, to wit 115,200 and the public debt, suppose of 80. millions, would require 12 figures, to wit 115,200,000,000. Such a system of money-arithmetic would be entirely unmanageable for the common purposes of society."

Walter Breen in his *United States Proof coinage magnum opus* echoed Jefferson's thoughts when he called the 1782-83 Gouverneur Morris monetary system, "Possibly the most ingenious and certainly the most cumbersome in history."

COIN WORLD: Then would you say that Thomas Jefferson killed the "Morris & Morris" decimal monetary system and its coinage?

FORD: In effect, he was for the main part

responsible for its eventual demise. Also, there was an acute shortage of bullion, and Congress was both confused and divided on practically every issue, including the implementation of its own go-ahead for a Mint and the resulting coinage. It clearly was an idea whose time, regardless of form, had not yet come.

COIN WORLD: Where can we find specifications for the three 1783 silver NOVA CONSTELLATIO coins?

FORD: They are contained in the Jan. 15, 1782, address of Robert Morris to Congress, based upon the system devised by Gouverneur Morris. The smallest silver coin was to be called a "Cent" (later changed to "Bit"), and was to weigh 27 grains, consisting of 25 grains of fine silver plus 2 grains of copper (actual weight of Garrett 619, 27.7 grains); the "Quint" of 500 Units was to weigh 135 grains, equaling five of the Cents or Bits (actual

Please turn to page 4



Alexander Hamilton, 1755-1804, who became the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury in 1789, served on a committee in 1782 to study the coinage proposal offered by Robert Morris, Superintendent of Finance.



David Rittenhouse, who later became the first Mint Director of the United States, was consulted by Robert Morris as the Superintendent of Finance rushed ahead, pell-mell, in 1782, to put together a Mint and its machinery, rather than simply develop a plan for Congressional approval.



Francis Hopkinson, 1737-1791, signer of the Declaration of Independence, Continental Loan Office official, admiralty and district court judge, scientist, author, wit, sought position as "Superintendent of Public Mint" in a letter to Thomas Jefferson May 12, 1784. Robert Morris actually made offer of Mint Directorship to Hopkinson in 1782.



Samuel Curwen, 1715-1802, elderly American refugee, who spent the Revolutionary War years in England. The unique 1783 NOVA CONSTELLATIO copper "Five" was presented to him in London May 15, 1784.



Josiah Bartlett, 1729-1795, signer of the Declaration of Independence from New Hampshire, medical doctor, militia colonel, Superior court justice and New Hampshire's first governor. He gave the long lost 1783 NOVA CONSTELLATIO copper "five" to Samuel Curwen in London in May, 1784.

Copper 'Five' unit lost nearly 200 years

Continued from page 3

weight of Garrett 620, 134.6 grains); and the "Mark" of 1000 Units was to weigh 270 grains, being the equal of ten Cents or Bits or two Quints (actual weight of Garrett 622, 268.5 grains).

COIN WORLD: Earlier, you said that die engraver and coiner Dudley gave Robert Morris the first of the NOVA CONSTELLATIO pieces on April 2, 1783, and that this was the larger one or 1000 Unit coin. When did Dudley make the remaining three coins and when did he deliver them to the Superintendent of Finance?

FORD: Robert Morris bugged Benjamin Dudley all through April, 1783, most specifically on April 16 and 17. On April 22, according to Morris' diary, Dudley delivered specimens of the remaining three denominations. This delivery, in my opinion, consisted of one "Quint" (500 Units), three "Cents" (or "Bits"), the 100 Unit coin, and one copper "Five" (5 Units). All of these were from dies created in part with the use of prepared punches.

COIN WORLD: What did Superintendent Morris do with the sample coins?

FORD: That's a good question! Robert Morris sent an undesignated number of the coins to Congress, with a letter, on April 23, 1783. I assume that he sent all of the six coins struck.

COIN WORLD: Then what happened?

FORD: Congress, upon receipt of the coins and the letter from the Superintendent of Finance, discharged the committee friendly to Morris that had been appointed the previous December and referred his missive along with the specimen coins to a new committee of five persons.

One member of the new committee, William Hemsley, requested a restatement of the plan submitted on January 15, 1782, the original one put forth by Robert Morris that expressed the ideas of Gouverneur Morris. Assistant financier Gouverneur Morris was given the job of trying to sell the scheme to Hemsley, a logical move since he had put it all together originally.

On April 30, 1783, a week after Robert Morris sent the sample coins to Congress, Gouverneur Morris replied to Hemsley, attempting to re-explain his system and its implementation. This selling job, not as long nor as elaborate

as the original proposal of January, 1782, emphasized five points:

"1. Reasons why a coin should be struck. 2. The denomination of such coin. 3. The quantity of fine silver in such denomination. 4. The expence of a coinage. 5. The different pieces of coin proposed."

It is of interest to note that, this time around, the names of the proposed denominations were not mentioned. Instead, Gouverneur Morris wrote, "The names of these coins will be just what you please." Presumably, somebody carrying some weight had objected to the "Five," "Cent," "Quint," and "Mark" designations. The letter of April 30, 1783, was undoubtedly intended to be a private communication to an inquiring committee member, rather than an official report.

In any event, nothing happened so far as Hemsley and the new committee of which he was a member was concerned. Subsequently, Congress referred the letters of Robert Morris of January 15, 1782 (the original long-winded proposition) and that of Gouverneur Morris of April 30, 1783 (the re-explanation) to still another committee, which consisted of FitzSimons, Izard, Stephen Higginson, James Duane, and James Madison.

This committee recommended on August 5, 1783, that Robert Morris be asked to present to Congress an estimate of the cost of establishing a Mint, including buildings, equipment, salaries of workmen, and so forth. The recommendation, in the form of a report, was merely "entered and read," which effectively brought Morris' hope of establishing a functioning Mint to an end.

Under date of August 19, 1783, Robert Morris entered in his diary: "I sent for Mr. Benjamin Dudley, and informed him of my doubts about the establishment of a Mint and desired him to think of some employment in private service, in which I am willing to assist him all in my power. I told him to make out an account for the services he had performed for the public, and submit at the Treasury office for inspection and settlement" (*Historical Magazine*, I, page 32). Poor Dudley was finally paid off on January 7, 1784.

COIN WORLD: There must have been other reasons why things went wrong? Why did all the Mint-coinage ideas die in 1783?

FORD: As I see it, Robert Morris attempted to put together the Gouverneur Morris concept and plan of 1781-82 as a package, complete with actual coins, skilled mechanics, and the facilities for coinage, in order to get a confused, divided, and often indifferent Congress to buy it. This attempt at what amounted to a *fait accompli* failed for numerous reasons.

One, not heretofore mentioned, can be found in the (Robert) Morris Papers. In a letter of July 25, 1782, from the Superintendent of Finance to a Rev. William Gordon, D.D., in speaking of Dudley's work towards setting up a Mint and making coins, we find:

"The Business in which he is intended to be employed, is like many other important matters, retarded by the tediousness of the States in supplying the Continental Treasury."

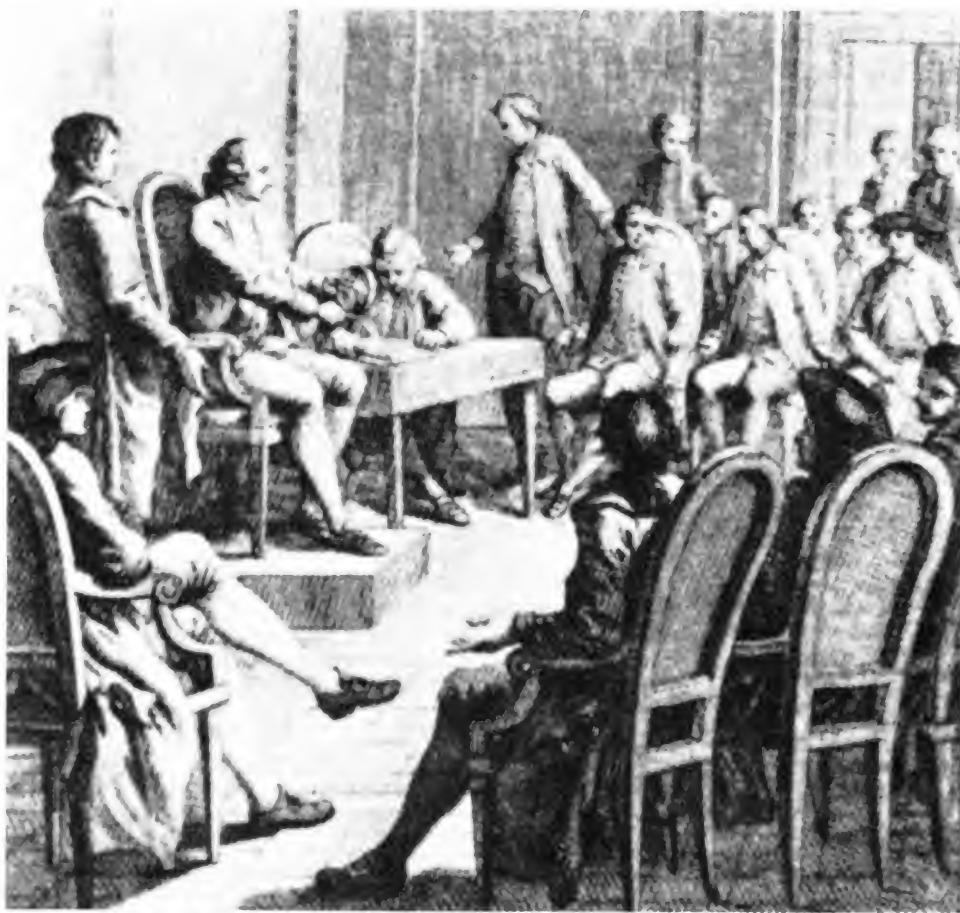
There you have it; along with everything else, there was "no money with which to make money." A situation which can always bring things to a halt!

COIN WORLD: Whatever happened to the "four Pair of Dies for the Public Mint" that Crosby alluded to? And what happened to the six (your figure) coins that Robert Morris sent to Congress in April of 1783?

FORD: Crosby himself, quoting from Robert Morris' diary, tells us that on August 30 (1783), "Mr. Dudley brought the dies for Coining in the American Mint." When the Office of Finance obtained the dies they also received the coins back that had been sent to Congress. This may not have happened at exactly the same time, but as I will explain subsequently, Robert Morris did get back his sample pieces, those that had been submitted on April 23 with a covering letter. However, sometime after the summer of 1783, but prior to March of the following year, the 5 Unit NOVA CONSTELLATIO copper "disappeared," much like some of the 1974 aluminum cents, of recent memory, did.

COIN WORLD: What do you mean when you say that the "Five" or 5 Unit piece "disappeared?"

FORD: Obviously, the solitary copper, the "Five," didn't stay with the five silver coins, as it ended up in England in May of 1784. Either Robert Morris, to whom I am sure the six coins were returned, or Gouverneur Morris, the assistant financier, removed the lowest denominated piece from the group and gave it to a friend or else someone in the Office of Finance helped it to disappear! Whatever the circumstances, we know that it ended up with Josiah Bartlett, the important gentleman from New Hampshire.



No, these early congressmen are not mulling over pattern coins, although the scene (first Continental Congress) is typical. The man taking notes is Charles Thomson, secretary of congress, who received five silver NOVA CONSTELLATIO patterns from Thomas Jefferson May 11, 1784.

COIN WORLD: How did you conclude that only ONE 1000 Unit, ONE 500 Unit, THREE 100 Unit, and ONE 5 Unit, 1783 NOVA CONSTELLATIO coins were struck?

FORD: First of all, I carefully read and studied *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, March 1784 to February 1785, as brilliantly edited by Julian P. Boyd (Vol. 7, Princeton University Press, 1953.) Then, I blended the fruits of that study and a little other research with some logic and much conjecture! . . .

Thomas Jefferson, who thought that the Gouverneur Morris plan was too complicated, entered Congress in the autumn of 1783. Early in the following year, he interested himself in the subject of a money unit and of determining the vital point of money arithmetic. Clearly, he thought this much more important than the continuation of Morris' preoccupation with the setting up of a Mint and manufacturing coins.

Jefferson put together some "Notes on Coinage" during March and April, 1784. In these observations, he patiently dissected the concept arrived at by Gouverneur Morris and promoted by Robert Morris and outlined his many objections to their proposals. On April 26, Jefferson transmitted his "Notes" to Robert Morris, rather than submitting them as a resolution, in order to defuse Morris' possible opposition to his thoughts.

Robert Morris, on May 1, 1784, replied immediately to the future president, sending him a comprehensive package of items in an attempt to bolster the original scheme of Gouverneur Morris and perhaps even to reopen its chances of consideration by Congress. The enclosures that accompanied a letter sent by Robert Morris from the Office of Finance were: (1) Copy of the Robert Morris proposal to Congress, Jan. 15, 1782; (2) Copy of the letter from Gouverneur Morris to William Hemsley, April 30, 1783; (3) Manuscript of Jefferson's "Notes on Coinage" (just sent to RM); (4) Copy of the Robert Morris letter to Congress, April 23, 1783, the one that accompanied the specimen coins sent for examination; (5) An undesignated number of the coins themselves, the same lot (less the copper "Five") that was sent to Congress and returned to the financier a few months later.

Unhappily, as you can see, in the package accompanying his letter of May 1 and in his missive to Congress of April 23, 1783, Robert Morris, in both instances, failed to specify the number of coins or to indicate what their denominations might be. However, in his letter of May 1, 1784, while mentioning the coin enclosures, Robert Morris asked Thomas Jefferson to deliver them to Charles Thomson. . . "These you will be so kind as to deliver to the Secretary of Congress after you have done with them. . ."

On May 7, Jefferson recorded the receipt of the Morris letter and enclosures. An entry in Thomas Jefferson's Account Book for May 11, 1784, indicates that he had "left with C. Thomson as specimen of coins 1.8 D."

This tells it all so far as I am concerned, in that I believe that the reference to "1.8 D." not only reveals what coins Jefferson passed

on to Thomson, but discloses how many silver pieces were struck in April of 1783.

On the assumption that "1.8 D." only referred to silver coins and that Jefferson had accepted Morris' designation of the largest coin as the dollar (1000 Units), I take it that TJ gave Secretary Thomson one Mark (1000 Units), one Quint (500 Units), and three Cents or "Bits" (of 100 Units each, totaling 300 Units).

Hopefully, the picture that I am trying to present is clear. Let us assume that six coins were sent to Congress April 23, 1783, and that these were returned to Robert Morris when his deal seemingly died four months later. We know that the lowest denomination, the copper "Five" did not stay with the group, as it ended up with Josiah Bartlett. That leaves us with five silver coins. . . these I believe went from Morris to Jefferson to Thomson. Four days after Jefferson gave the cited "1.8 D." to Charles Thomson, Judge Bartlett, across the ocean in London, presented the missing copper to Samuel Curwen.

COIN WORLD: Isn't there a good chance that there were TWO sets or groups of NOVA CONSTELLATIO patterns, one going to Congress on April 23, 1783, the other to Jefferson on May 1, 1784?

FORD: No, where are they? I'll stand on the conclusions built upon my basic hypothesis, which in turn is predicated upon A. Dubois being paid for his work on four pair (or sets) of dies.

COIN WORLD: We now know that our correspondent covering the Garrett sale session of Nov. 29 erred in stating that you had purchased lot No. 621, the "Type II" Quint. That coin, the one lacking the obverse legend, opened at \$25,000 and sold for \$55,000. Did you bid on it at all?

FORD: No. In my opinion it is not part of the four piece set. The obverse is of a different appearance, displaying an atypical style, and so far as I am concerned, was not struck from a die produced by the same hand that did the other four NOVA CONSTELLATIO obverses. Furthermore, the "Type II" Quint is at least 25 full grains light, and thus is in conflict with the specifications put forth by the Morris. (These, of course, were: 100 Units, 25 grains of silver, 2 grains of copper; 500 Units, 125 grains of silver, 10 grains of copper; 1000 Units, 250 grains of silver, 20 grains of copper.)

The coin, however, is of considerable peripheral interest and requires further extensive study. It must fit into the picture somewhere, but at the moment I'm not quite sure where, although I have some rather intriguing ideas.

COIN WORLD: Okay, assuming that you are correct, we know that five of the six regular 1783 coins, from Dudley's dies, are known, plus one odd Quint or 500 Unit piece from an obverse die lacking the legend. Can you give us the history of each of these, at least as far as you have been able to establish it?

FORD: Following consultation with Carl W. A. Carlson, former curator of the Garrett

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Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, to whom Robert Morris sent five silver NOVA CONSTELLATIO coins May 1-7, 1784. His objections led to the abandonment of the Gouverneur Morris coinage proposals. (Charles Willson Peale portrait.)



Charles Thomson, 1729-1824, Secretary of Congress, 1774-1789, to whom Thomas Jefferson delivered five silver NOVA CONSTELLATIO patterns on May 11, 1784. Jefferson duly recorded the transaction in his journal.

Ford disputes bit of numismatic mythology

Continued from page 4

collection, and with the help of both John Adams of Boston and Frank Campbell, the highly cooperative librarian of the American Numismatic Society, I was able to compile the following lists showing ownership. These contain some new information, but there are several holes, and some dates and owners need verification.



(1) 1783 Mark, 1000 Unit piece. Alloyed silver; edge ornamented with twin olive leaves. Weight (Bowers & Ruddy Galleries), 268.5 grains.

Benjamin Dudley (maker, provisional Mint employee, Office of Finance)

Robert Morris, April 2, 1783

"William Hemsley" Congressional Committee, April 23, 1783

Robert Morris, August, 1783 (exact date unknown)

Thomas Jefferson, May 7, 1784

Charles Thomson, Secretary of Congress, May 11, 1784

John Thomson, nephew, Newark, Del., (found 1000 Unit and 500 Unit coins in secret compartment of uncle's desk)

Samuel E. Thomson, son of John, Newark, Dela.

Rathmell Wilson, Wilmington, Dela.

John W. Haseltine, Spring of 1872

Henry S. Adams, Boston, as lot No. 345, auction sale of Messrs.

Birch & Son, 1110 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, (Sold for \$540 with 500 Unit piece, lot No. 346; the pair of coins reserved at \$500), December 18, 1872

Sylvester S. Crosby, Boston, (Adams may have purchased both coins as Crosby's agent at the Birch & Son sale), 1873, possibly as late as 1882

Lorin G. Parmelee, Boston. Parmelee purchased the Crosby collection en masse, in much the same way that he obtained the Seavey, Bushnell, Brevort and lesser cabinets, sometime between 1875 and 1882. He placed many of the pieces in John W. Haseltine's Seventieth Sale, June 27-29, 1883, where the contents were described as "...the Entire Collection of Sylvester S. Crosby..." (When his own collection went on the block, the 1000 Unit coin was offered as lot No. 580, auction sale of the Parmelee collection, New York Coin & Stamp Co., H.P. Smith, David Proskey, June 25-27, 1890, in conjunction with both varieties of the 500 Unit denomination, lots No. 581, No. 582, and the 100 Unit piece with ornamented edge, lot No. 583.

The four coins were offered as a set and bidding commenced at \$1,000; the Chapman brothers bid up to \$1,310, at which point H. P. Smith, using the code name "Clay," said \$1,350 and bought them in. Smith may have been acting for his own account, but it is more likely that he "protected" the set of four silver coins by buying them in for Parmelee.) Circa 1882 (but possibly as early as 1875) to ca. 1903-06

Samuel Hudson & Henry Chapman, Philadelphia, circa 1903-06

George H. Earle, Jr., Philadelphia, ca. 1903-06 to as late as 1912-13

Hon. James W. Ellsworth, New York City (purchased from Earle via Henry Chapman, Philadelphia, subsequent to 1906; exhibited at the American Numismatic Society, Jan.-Feb., 1914), circa 1906-13 to 1922-23

John Work Garrett, Baltimore. (In March, 1923, Wayte Raymond, then of 489 Park Ave., New York City, negotiated the purchase of the Ellsworth U.S. numismatic material from M. Knoedler & Co. The Knoedler art syndicate had acquired the 2,000 or so piece American coin collection along with Ellsworth's art and paintings.

Raymond split the purchase with Garrett, the Baltimore collector obtaining essentially the Colonials and Pioneer Gold for \$50,000, which amount was paid directly to Knoedler in New York City by J. W. Garrett. According to purchase records compiled by Carl Carlson, the Mark or 1000 Unit piece was valued at \$4,000 in the Knoedler-Raymond-Garrett transaction.) 1923 to 1942

The Johns Hopkins University, 1942 to 1979.



(2) 1783 Quint, 500 Unit piece; type as last, with legend NOVA CONSTELLATIO. Alloyed silver; edge ornamented with twin olive leaves. Weight (Bowers & Ruddy Galleries), 134.6 grains.

The provenance and history of this coin, the second highest denomination in the regular or official four piece set, is the same as that of the Mark, except that it was delivered to Robert Morris by Benjamin Dudley on April 22, 1783.

COIN WORLD: Interruption! We have heard that John W. Haseltine, once while reminiscing, disclosed how he had originally obtained the Mark and Quint from the Thomson heirs. Do you know this story?

FORD: Yes! Capt. Haseltine gave an address at the 1908 American Numismatic Association convention, which was held in Philadelphia; his talk was published in *The Numismatist*, Oct.-Nov., 1908 (Vol. XXI, Nos. 10-11).

In discussing his numismatic activities and experiences, old timer Haseltine revealed how he had sought out and unearthed the 1000 and 500 Unit NOVA CONSTELLATIO coins that the Hon. Charles Thomson had concealed in his desk. His tale is quite amusing:

"It is well known to all Numismatists the delight one experiences in finding a rare coin or a new variety, obtained sometimes for a trifle; or the discovery of a unique coin, though not always without considerable trouble.

"The first designs for a United States dollar and half dollar, the Nova Constellatio—one thousand, and five hundred mill pieces—were obtained by me after over one year's search. Mr. Eliot Woodward of Boston had in one of his sales two pieces described as 'one thousand, and five hundred mill pieces, struck in some soft metal.' They sold for some thirty or forty dollars each.

"I saw them and was confident that they were moulded in type metal and I knew the originals must be somewhere, but not known to collectors. I inquired at the United States Mint about them, and all the information I could obtain was that Mr. Mickley had borrowed the originals (which were in silver) from the owner and had copies made of them, and that an article in reference to them had been published in a newspaper in Philadelphia some years before. The paper was the *North American and United States Gazette*. That was all the information I could obtain, Mr. Mickley being dead.

"Whenever I had a spare moment I examined the back files of the *North American* for six or eight months, and finally found the article which merely stated that they had been found in a secret drawer in the desk of Charles Thomson, the Secretary of the first— or Continental Congress.

"I then found out who were the heirs or descendants of Mr. Thomson, and wrote to each one (not stating of course what I was after), merely mentioning that I had heard they had a collection of coins they wished to dispose of and that I was in the market to buy. The one favorable reply I received was from Mr. Rathmell Wilson of Wilmington, Delaware, from whom I finally purchased his collection. Imagine my delight when I found the said pieces struck in silver and in beautiful Proof condition."

COIN WORLD: In one of our earlier conversations, you stated that the history of the smallest 1783 NOVA CONSTELLATIO silver coin, the Cent or Bit, contained more than a little numismatic mythology. Could you tell us about that before you continue your historical listing showing ownership?

FORD: For years, authorities have accepted as gospel the story that the 100 Unit piece with ornamented edge initially appeared in a Scottish auction early in the 1880's, having long lain undiscovered in an old collection in Scotland. Everyone bought this legend, from the indefatigable Edgar H. Adams to the brilliant Walter Breen; it was even accepted as factual by the Bowers & Ruddy Galleries cataloger, appearing upon page 151 of the first Garrett sale (Nov. 28-29, 1979) catalog.

The tale had its origins in W. E. Woodward's 73rd auction listing, the Clark Sale, of April 2-3, 1885. It was enhanced by a 19th century version of "media-hype," appearing as a sort of press release, in the April, 1885, issue of the *American Journal of Numismatics* (Vol. XIX, page 81).

In the Journal article, Woodward (who apparently created his own publicity) suggested the idea that the lowly "Cent" had been in the

same (Scottish) "hiding place for the last century and upwards." He also "understood" that the aforementioned auction sale had been held in Glasgow.

The ultimate piece of rubbish, in the concocted yarn disseminated by dealer Woodward, was the price of £15, 15/, allegedly paid for the 1783 100 Unit coin having the twin olive leaf edge. The buyer was supposed to be a British dealer, who was willing to let it go for the price paid plus a commission of 10 percent.

As the story went, it was offered to a prominent collector, who after acquiring it, sent it to an American dealer (read: Woodward). . . A great story, but a false one, which, unhappily, has been passed down (like so many others) in the numismatic world for decades. That is precisely what I meant and mean by numismatic mythology.

The truth of the matter is that the coin WAS NOT in an old Scottish collection, that it WAS NOT sold at auction in Glasgow upon the dispersal of "the cabinet of a Scotch collector recently deceased," and, worse of all, it WAS NOT purchased for £15, 15/ (then \$78.75), or anything like it! Instead, would you believe that the actual price paid was 2/, 3d, or, at that time, all of 55¢ American!

COIN WORLD: Fantastic, if true! Where did you get this information? How can you establish its accuracy? Is it documented any place?

FORD: Over two years ago, Carl W. A. Carlson (the research director of NASCA), while reading through some old British auction sale catalogues of the 1880's, came upon one containing some startling information.

It was a "Catalogue of. . . Greek, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, Scotch and English Coins, Formed by E. Shorthouse, Esq., Member of the London Numismatic Society." The auction was held by Ludlow, Roberts & Weller, 18 New Street, Birmingham; the sale dates were Nov. 29, 30, Dec. 1, 2, 1886. Shorthouse apparently described the contents of the sale, which represented "a portion of (his) very valuable collection."

Near the center of the catalog (pages 59-63), Shorthouse, in a curious fashion, inserted an article titled "To American Coin Collectors." This presentation was enlivened by the use of a number of enticing headings.

These included: (1) "STOLEN."; (2) "THE GROAT DESCRIBED."; (3) "THE THIEF."; (4) "NOT THE FIRST TIME."; (5) "THREE YEARS' AMERICAN COIN COLLECTING IN ENGLAND."; (6) "AMERICAN COINS."; (7) "A DISCOVERY."; (8) "How 2s. 3d. (55 CENTS.) BECAME £54 (£272)."; (9) "PLUMS."; (10) "IN CONCLUSION."

Sections 7 and 8 are of particular interest, since they concern the discovery and sale of the 1783 Cent or "Bit," the only known specimen with an ornamented edge, the very coin that was lot No. 619 in the first Bowers and Ruddy Garrett offering.

Towards the middle of the paragraph aptly titled "How 2s. 3d. (55 Cents.) became £54 (£272)," the mischievous Mr. Shorthouse tells how he actually unearthed the smallest silver NOVA CONSTELLATIO: "The fact was, it was obtained (with some other small U.S. coins) for 2s. 3d. (55 cents.) from the shop window of T.F. Cloud, Pawnbroker, 207, High Holborn, London."

Having made this announcement (for sale catalogers as yet unborn), Shorthouse continued, "This incident is mentioned as an encouragement to young beginners in numismatics. It is something for a mere novice to add an hitherto unknown example to the coin series of a great Empire."

(The description of the United States, then as now a republic, lacking colonial possessions in 1886, as "a great Empire," shook me up as much as the disclosure of the origin of the 100 Unit piece.)

Earlier in the same paragraph, Shorthouse disclosed how he sent the coin to W. E. Woodward (late 1884, early 1885), reserving it at \$550 or one thousand times his cost (a generous markup, even by today's standards!).

Carl W.A. Carlson, who has included the whole story in the latest of his series describing T. H. Garrett's dealer intrigues, concludes that Woodward in telling the tale of the "old Scotch collector" who had "recently died" was undoubtedly taken in by the Englishman.

Although Shorthouse's revelations in his late 1886 sale catalogue left Woodward with much egg upon his face, the Boston-based dealer was lucky in that the Birmingham auction catalog had a very limited distribution, particularly in the States. (This limited distribution combines with the absence of U.S. coins in the Shorthouse catalog to explain the failure of American numismatists to notice it sooner.

Less forgivable, to those of us engaged in research, is failure to note the passage, dis-

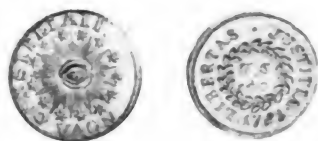
covered only recently, in the April, 1887, issue of the *American Journal of Numismatics* (Vol. XXI, pages 81-82). There, the relevant parts of Shorthouse's digression are reprinted without comment.)

The Carlson article bears the title, "Woodward and Garrett: An Historical Study of the Relations Between a Professional Dealer and Auction Cataloguer and a Prominent Numismatist in the 1880's." It should shortly appear in *The Numismatist*, and is highly recommended to those who have developed an interest in the Garrett collection or the Garretts, not to speak of the antics of 19th century coin dealers.

Before leaving the subject of the discovery of the small silver 100 Unit piece in London, it should be told that some months ago I relayed the story to my old friend, Peter D. Mitchell, in London. I also asked PDM, who is the managing director of A.H. Baldwin & Sons, Ltd., one of Britain's three largest numismatic houses, if he was aware of the Shorthouse auction catalog. In reply, Peter surprised me by telling me that he had never heard of the Birmingham sale (I thought that Baldwin's had everything published since the mid-18th century), and managed to stagger me with the information that the T.F. Cloud firm was still in business, having become jewelers over the years. To my further astonishment, he then proceeded to inform me that the Cloud establishment was where he had purchased his wife Fiona's engagement ring! This, of course, shows where research can take you and proves that, numismatically at least, it is a rather small world.

COIN WORLD: Now that you have compromised another segment of numismatic lore, can you get back to the historical listing showing ownership, over the years, of the five of the six regular 1783 Morris-Dudley coins known?

FORD: Certainly! I'll recommence with the piece just discussed, the one that rose in value from 55¢ (the price that Shorthouse paid for it) to \$97,500 (the amount realized by the identical specimen in the recent Garrett Collection offering).



(3) 1783 Cent or "Bit," 100 Unit piece. Alloyed silver; edge ornamented with twin olive leaves. Weight (Bowers & Ruddy Galleries), 27.7 grains.

Benjamin Dudley (maker, provisional Mint employee, Office of Finance)

Robert Morris, April 22, 1783

"William Hemsley" Congressional Committee, April 23, 1783

Robert Morris, August, 1783 (exact date unknown)

Thomas Jefferson, May 7, 1784

Charles Thomson, Secretary of Congress, May 11, 1784

T. F. Cloud, pawnbroker, 207, High Holborn, London, sold from shop window for 2/, 3d, 1882-84; earlier history (since 1784) speculative.

E. Shorthouse, 5, Charlotte Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, England, sent to W.E. Woodward, late 1884, early 1885; (initially offered as lot No. 1 in the separately printed Addenda to W. Elliot Woodward's Seventy-Third Sale, "The Clark Collection," April 2, 1885, but there failed to meet Shorthouse's "well meaning, judicious reverse of \$550" and went unsold) 1882-84 to April, 1886

Lorin G. Parmelee, Boston, as lot No. 1064, W. Elliot Woodward's Eighty-Third Sale, "The Twining Collection," April 27-29, 1886, at a cost of \$272. (Offered as lot No. 583, the Parmelee Collection sale, New York Coin & Stamp Co., H.P. Smith, David Proskey, June 25-27, 1890, together with the Mark of 1000 Units and both varieties of the Quint 500 Unit denomination; the set of four coins bought in by H.P. Smith for \$1,350, presumably for Parmelee's account.) April 29, 1886 to circa 1903-06

Hon. James W. Ellsworth, New York City, (believed to have been purchased indirectly from Parmelee, with H.P. Smith and both or just one of the Chapman brothers acting as agents; it is doubtful if G. H. Earle, Jr. ever owned this denomination, however briefly; exhibited at the American Numismatic Society, Jan.-Feb., 1914), circa 1903-06 to 1922-23

John Work Garrett, Baltimore. (Obtained in his part of the Ellsworth U.S. coin purchase negotiated by Wayte Raymond

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Ford continues tale of first U.S. coins

Continued from page 5

with M. Knoedler & Co., March, 1923. According to purchase records compiled by Carl Carlson, the Cent or "Bit," 100 Unit piece with ornamented edge, was valued at \$1,000 in the Knoedler-Raymond-Garrett transaction.) 1923 to 1942

The Johns Hopkins University, 1942 to 1979
(4) 1783 Cent or "Bit," 100 Unit piece. (Believed) alloyed silver; edge plain. Weight unknown to me.

Benjamin Dudley (maker, provisional Mint employee, Office of Finance)

Robert Morris, April 22, 1783

"William Hemsley" Congressional Committee, April 23, 1783

Robert Morris, August, 1783 (exact date unknown)

Thomas Jefferson, May 7, 1784

Charles Thomson, Secretary of Congress, May 11, 1784

(Either) T. Harrison Garrett (1886-88) or Robert Garrett (1903-19); earlier history unknown, but probably the second of the three pieces of this denomination (the third undiscovered, if still extant) sent by Morris to Jefferson, May 1-7, 1784, thence to Thomson.

John Work Garrett, discarded as a duplicate, March-April, 1923

Guttat Brothers, 52 Wall Street, New York City. Obtained by them from Wayte Raymond, representing JWG; Carl Carlson's records show that J. W. Garrett received \$2,200 for this piece (or \$1,200 more than he paid for the one with the twin olive leaf device upon its edge). Described and offered in the Guttat Brothers circular of May 2, 1923, to be sold no earlier than May 23 of that year.

Col. E.H. R. Green (unverified)

B. G. Johnson Estate (unverified)

Eric P. Newman, St. Louis, Mo.



(5) 1783 Five, 5 Unit piece; type as previous, with legend NOVA CONSTELLATIO upon obverse. Copper; edge plain. Diameter, 24.35 mm. Weight, 75.15 grains. Conservatively graded by me as Abt. Unc.-50. Undoubtedly struck as a Proof.

Benjamin Dudley (maker, provisional Mint employee, Office of Finance)

Robert Morris, April 22, 1783

"William Hemsley" Congressional Committee, April 23, 1783

Robert Morris, August, 1783 (exact date unknown)

Josiah Bartlett, Fall of 1783 or early Winter of 1784

Samuel Curwen, presented to him in London, May 15, 1784

Alleged to have surfaced in a French collection of British Colonial coins; discovered in or near Paris by a British dealer, October, 1977

Fred S. Werner, Bellmore, N.Y., obtained directly from the British dealer finder, Dec. 11, 1977

John J. Ford Jr., Rockville Centre, N.Y., purchased Feb. 14, 1978

(6) 1783 Quint, 500 Unit piece; atypical type, obverse lacking legend, single line inner border. (Presumably) alloyed silver; edge



A South East View of the City of New York in North America (1768) drawn on the spot by Capt. Thomas Howdell of the Royal Artillery. Large building, center, is King's College, founded in 1754 to prevent exposure of New York youths to radical political ideas at Yale or Princeton. Ironically, both Alexander Hamilton and Gouverneur Morris studied at King's.

(weakly and unevenly) ornamented with twin olive leaves. Weight (Bowers & Ruddy Galleries), 109.6 grains (versus standard of 135 grains). Graffiti, probably a date or name, scratched in upper rev. field, above U.S. (within wreath).

Dudley, Eckfield, Dubois; provisional Mint, Office of Finance (exact history, including reasons for design of obverse, striking, and underweight flan, as yet unestablished)

Young man in New York City, "... handed down by his grandfather as a family relic." Illustrated in and commented upon in *The Curiosity Cabinet*, October, 1870 (Vol. I, No. 2) (a publication of William P. Brown, 28 John Street, New York City.)

Brown commented: "This coin is the only one known of this variety, and has never before been described; it is in fine condition, size 15½ American scale, with engrailed (sic) edge; but owing to a slight flaw has not a good ring..." (The Brown story and accompanying illustration were picked up and reproduced, the text almost word for word, in *Mason's Monthly Coin and Stamp Collectors' Magazine*, November, 1870 (Vol. 4, No. 11), a Philadelphia publication)

Sylvester S. Crosby, Boston, apparently purchased, soon after the announcements of the discovery of the piece appeared, through the good offices of either J. W. Scott or W. E. Woodward. Circa 1871-72, possibly as late as 1882

Lorin G. Parmelee, Boston, obtained in his purchase of the entire Crosby collection, sometime between 1875 and 1882. (Offered as lot No. 582, the Parmelee Collection sale, New York Coin & Stamp Co., H.P. Smith, David Proskey, June 25-27, 1890, together with the Mark of 1000 Units, lot No. 580, the regular or normal Quint of 500 Units, lot No. 581, and the 100 Unit example with ornamented edge, lot No. 583; the set of four coins bought in by H. P. Smith for \$1,350, most probably for Parmelee's account, at one of the biggest auction sale disasters in American numismatic history.) Circa 1882 (but possibly as early as 1875) to ca. 1903-06

Hon. James W. Ellsworth, New York City, (like the Cent or "Bit," believed to have been purchased indirectly from Parmelee, with H. P. Smith and both Chapman brothers, or just Henry Chapman, acting as agents; it is also doubtful if G. H. Earle, Jr. ever owned this odd, atypical Quint, however briefly; exhibited at the American Numismatic Society, Jan.-Feb., 1914), circa 1903-6 to 1922-23

John Work Garrett, Baltimore. (Also obtained in his part of the Ellsworth U.S. coin purchase negotiated by Wayte Raymond with M. Knoedler & Co., March, 1923. According to Carl Carlson's Garrett accession compilations, both types of the Quint were figured at \$2,000 each, suggesting the haste in which the Knoedler-Raymond-Garrett transaction breakdown, on a coin by coin basis, was calculated.) 1923 to 1942

The Johns Hopkins University, 1942 to 1979

Walter Perschke, Chicago, as lot No. 621, the first of *The Garrett Collection Sales*, Bowers & Ruddy Galleries, Nov. 28-29, 1979

COIN WORLD: Now that you have given us the pedigree history of six (of the seven possible) official 1783 NOVA CONSTELLATIO pat-



Mood of the nation in 1783, the date of the NOVA CONSTELLATIO patterns, is reflected in this 1783 cartouche entitled "Washington founding the United States of America." It shows Washington leading Liberty with Franklin to the right, writing in a book, accompanied by the goddesses Justice and probably Wisdom. On top Fame rides a cloud, and the American flag with 13 stars flies over the whole scene. The cartouche was published April 3, 1783 by John Wallis at a map warehouse in London.

terns, of all kinds, undoubtedly struck, may we impose with a few follow-up questions? For instance, can you tell us how and why you think that the three smaller pieces, the 100 Unit coins, got away from Charles Thomson after the group of five silver pieces were given to him on May 11, 1784, at the written request of Robert Morris?

FORD: As I said earlier, only the regular (with legend) Quint and the Mark were found in Secretary Thomson's desk by his nephew. These 500 and 1000 Unit coins represented 1500 Units in value. As Jefferson noted that he had "left with C. Thomson as specimen of coins 1.8 D" (1800 Units), you are correct in concluding that three 100 Unit pieces "got away" from Thomson.

My theory, not altogether original and still in the primary stages of development, is that Thomson, upon the request of Gouverneur Morris, gave him two, or possibly all three of the small 100 Unit Cents or "Bits."

Since we know that it was Morris' idea and concept that the series illustrated, it is not surprising that Gouverneur Morris would be interested in acquiring a few examples of the coins struck.

This is particularly true, if you assume (as I do), that the assistant financier of the Confederation not only arrived at the system employed re the coin denominations and their relative weights, but that he was also responsible for the design of the 1783 coins and their legends (NOVA CONSTELLATIO, LIBERTAS • JUSTITIA, and U.S.).

Furthermore, the idea has been expressed by several authorities that Gouverneur Morris, after Congress let his coinage and the Mint idea more or less die, did not want to waste the fruit of his fertile mind... the more so, if further utilization resulted in a little profit.

Accordingly, it is my strong belief that Gouverneur Morris sent an agent to England (not going abroad himself until 1789), who carried with him one or (more likely) two of the 100 Unit coins. These were to be taken to Birmingham and there used as models for the manufacture of dies, the ultimate idea being the striking of "commercial coppers" for import into the newly established United States.

Lacking a denomination, the resulting copper coins (of varying weight) could be introduced into commerce as either halfpennies or cents. Thus, we have the origin of the relatively common Nova Constellatio Coppers.

In commenting upon this series, Crosby, again in his *Early Coins of America*, page 331, shows early support for Gouverneur Morris' involvement: "But little is known of the history of these tokens. The most that can be learned in relation to them is contained in the following extract from (Charles I.) Bushnell's Numismatic Notes in manuscript:

"The Nova Constellatios were made in Birmingham, in England, and the dies were cut by (George) Wyon, of that place. Over forty tons were issued from one die alone, and many more from another. They were manufactured by order of a gentleman of New York, who is believed to have been Gouverneur Morris' (italics are mine)."

If my thinking is correct, in that GM did send one or two of the 100 Unit coins to England, then the missing Cent or "Bit" might turn up there, as did the specimen from the Garrett collection, sold as lot No. 619 in the November 29 offering by Bowers and Ruddy Galleries.

COIN WORLD: You suggest that George Wyon was responsible for the Nova Constellatio Coppers, while others, including Q. David Bowers in his splendid *The History of United States Coinage As Illustrated by the Garrett Collection*, say it is Thomas Wyon. Which Wyon was it, or does anyone really know? Also, can you explain why many of the Birmingham Nova Constellatio copper coins bear the date of 1783, when Thomson did not receive the original silver specimens until May of 1784?

FORD: Over the years, various writers have identified different members of the

Wyon family as being responsible for the Birmingham coinage activities of 1785. Clearly, the subject should be further delved into and studied carefully. For the present, I tend to agree with Walter Breen. WB, in his *Encyclopedia of United States and Colonial Proof Coins, 1722-1977*, on page 8, notes (when speaking of a Proof 1783, NOVA CONSTELLATIO copper, Crosby 3-C): "The maker was probably George Wyon 3rd (ca. 1744-97), assisted by the teen-aged twins Thomas and Peter George (b. 1767)." The obvious answer to the second part of your query is that all of the coppers were struck in 1785, although a great many bore the misleading date of 1783.

COIN WORLD: Now that you have reassembled the original set of the four regular 1783 NOVA CONSTELLATIO patterns, and thank you for going over the subject with us in such depth, what are your plans concerning these coins?

FORD: There are a great many unanswered riddles I would like to see solved. For instance, what was the origin and purpose of the unusual Quint, that lacking an obverse legend, and why does one of the 100 Unit pieces have a plain edge? Those are major questions; there are numerous minor ones. I would like to locate a copy of the pertinent (Robert) Morris Papers and to do some searching for data in both Philadelphia and Birmingham, England, among other projects.

COIN WORLD: Before we close this interview, would you give us one last comment concerning your set of the four Morris-Confederation coins, the three silver pieces and the new discovery?

FORD: As we know, Robert Morris, in his diary entry for April 2, 1783, said that a silver coin had been delivered to him and that it was "... THE FIRST THAT HAS BEEN STRUCK AS AN AMERICAN COIN." What can I add to that?



Gouverneur Morris